

As an organic dairy farmer I have read with great interest the comments posted on your website. Most of the comments from conventional farmers or producer organizations argue that there are no differences between organic and chemically produced commodities (Milk is milk!) or that this regulation unfairly pits one method of farming against another. These folks just don't get it. There are very real differences between my organic milk and conventional milk and between organic and conventional products in general. Several studies have shown remarkable increases in nutritional value in organic produce over conventional produce. USDA's own research has shown a large decrease in vitamin and mineral levels in chemically produced grains in the last 25 years. Also, my milk does not contain residues of pesticides, antibiotics, or elevated levels of the carcinogen IGF-1 that is found in milk produced from cows treated with rBGH. My milk is also produced at a far lesser cost to the environment. This is why consumers are willing to pay 2-3 times as much for organic milk in the supermarkets. The reality is that we, as organic farmers, have done far more to promote our products simply by being organic than the promotion boards have ever been able to do for us. We are paying assessments to fund advertising that not only ignores our products but tries to fool the consumer into believing that "milk is milk" and glosses over the food safety and environmental concerns associated with chemically produced products. It is this tendency on the part of conventional agriculture to try to deny all evidence of very real food safety problems and "shoot the messenger" that has unfortunately pitted one segment of agriculture against another.

I also find absurd the contention by the NMPF that if a organic farmer sells a non-organic item, like wood, that they should lose their exemption. Should I choose to sell logs from my wood lot, or tomatoes from my garden, doesn't change the fact that 100% of the milk I produce is certified organic. Such a narrow interpretation of the law is nonsense and was never the intent of Congress.

Please recognize that organic farmers sell into a very different marketplace than that one appealed to by the promotion boards. Until there is in place an Organic Produce Promotion Board it is only right to fully exempt us from these assessments.

Thank you, Richard Fessenden

received
6-25-04